

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: June 6, 2012

TO: Michael Drollinger, Planning Commission Chair
Members of Renton Planning Commission

FROM: Erika Conkling, AICP, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: D-93 Redevelopment and Existing Structures

Instead of supplying a staff report with a proposed code amendment, this issue paper is intended to stimulate discussion on this docket item. The desired outcome is for the Planning Commission to provide direction on this topic and staff will return on the following meeting with a staff report and code proposal.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The R-14 zone first made an appearance in Renton's zoning code ten years ago as part of the *Residential Planned Neighborhood* designation. It was designed to provide an incentive for compact urban development with single family character, but providing a range of housing options that would enhance neighborhoods and meet the increasing demands for housing created by growth. With the statewide mandated major update to the Comprehensive Plan in 2004, policies were added to ensure that these developments included good site planning to ensure high quality development with adequate light and air, open space, privacy for units, and coordinated parking at the rear or side. Specific updates to the R-14 zone (as well as amendments to the zoning map) were deferred to the time of Highlands Sub-Area planning, with the intent of reforming the R-14 to allow for townhome and cottage style development.

Following from this, in 2005-2007 staff advocated for the application of R-14 zoning in the Renton Highlands Sunset Area. The purpose was to provide an incentive for new development that would transform this neighborhood. Existing development was about four units per acre and R-10 zoning was not providing an incentive for redevelopment. R-14 allowed a diversity of housing types and enough of a density bonus to make it profitable to redevelop.

This strategy to provide incentives for revitalization became important to the Sunset Area Revitalization Program. Upzoning the Sunset Area and adding a bonus density up to 18 units per acre in the R-14 zone were intended to be major incentives. Other incentives have included completion of necessary environmental work up-front in the *Sunset Area Planned Action and EIS*, property tax exemptions and fee waivers that apply

to certain types of development, and public investment in infrastructure and amenities for the neighborhood.

Redevelopment will only transform the neighborhood if it fulfills the policy objectives stated in the Comprehensive Plan. *Residential Medium Density* development, which is constructed under the R-14 zone, emphasizes a variety of housing types and creative approaches to housing. Providing open spaces and public amenities within developments, promoting pedestrian circulation, and orienting new units to public streets and parks through good site planning are other important characteristics. Supporting these objectives, the Community Design Element directs residential design to preserve privacy and quality of life. Site plans should orient homes to a street or common area, not a parking lot. Pedestrians should be the focus of the site plan and parking should be discouraged in the front setback.

ISSUE

Should existing units be required to be removed when property is subdivided in the R-14 zone?

ANALYSIS

In 2006, the community expressed deep reservations about plans for redevelopment in the Renton Highlands. Concerns were expressed about changes to zoning codes that would make existing homes non-conforming structures, or codes that would require existing units to be removed. This was seen by the public as a way of forcing existing residents out of the neighborhood in a time that was highly politically charged. The *Report and Recommendations* of the Highlands Area Citizen's Zoning Task Force (November 2006) was clear that upon subdivision existing units should be upgraded, but there should be no requirement for their removal. Thus, R-14 zoning changes adopted in 2007 did not require removal of existing units upon redevelopment.

By increasing the development potential, it was assumed then that the market would naturally result in removal of existing units. Existing units in the Sunset Area are, in most cases, poorly placed near the center of a quarter-acre lot, making it tough to squeeze units around them. The cost of buying these modest properties was high enough that the existing unit would likely be removed in order to get enough density to make a profit. A couple property owners had discussed proposals for redevelopment with staff in the few months between adoption of the new regulations in May 2007 and the plunge in the real estate market. In all cases, they planned to remove the existing units.

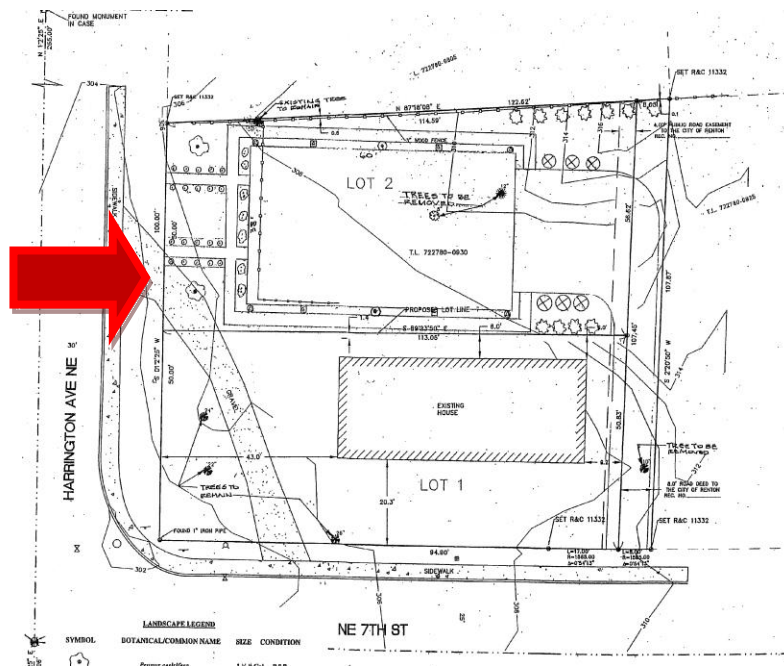
Leaving the existing home in place creates challenges. The City received a letter from a neighbor in December expressing quality of life concerns when the existing units are allowed to remain. First, squeezing new units around the existing units does not meet

any of the policies for residential design or medium density development. Units lack privacy and open space, are oriented toward parking areas, and do not provide creative approaches or multiple housing types. The result is more low quality housing that preserves a style of development and inefficiency in the use of space that is inconsistent with the smart growth principles promoted for Sunset Area Revitalization. Second, this style of development also threatens the community vision developed by the Phase II Highlands Task Force. This Community Vision focused on the Sunset Area as an attractive destination where quality of life was preserved with growth and development. The neighborhood would be interconnected and walkable and feel safe and secure. Site plans in which the existing units remain do not promote this vision. Third, to fuel revitalization of the neighborhood, the City is making investments in the Sunset Area including new stormwater facilities, a new King County Library building, and a new park. Renton Housing Authority is redeveloping Sunset Terrace public housing into a mixed income community and the Renton School District is building a new Early Childhood Education center. Incentives are designed to attract private development that will continue to invest in the community. Preservation of housing that is outdated (at best) and dilapidated (at worst) only creates another obstacle to redevelopment.

SITE PLAN REVIEW

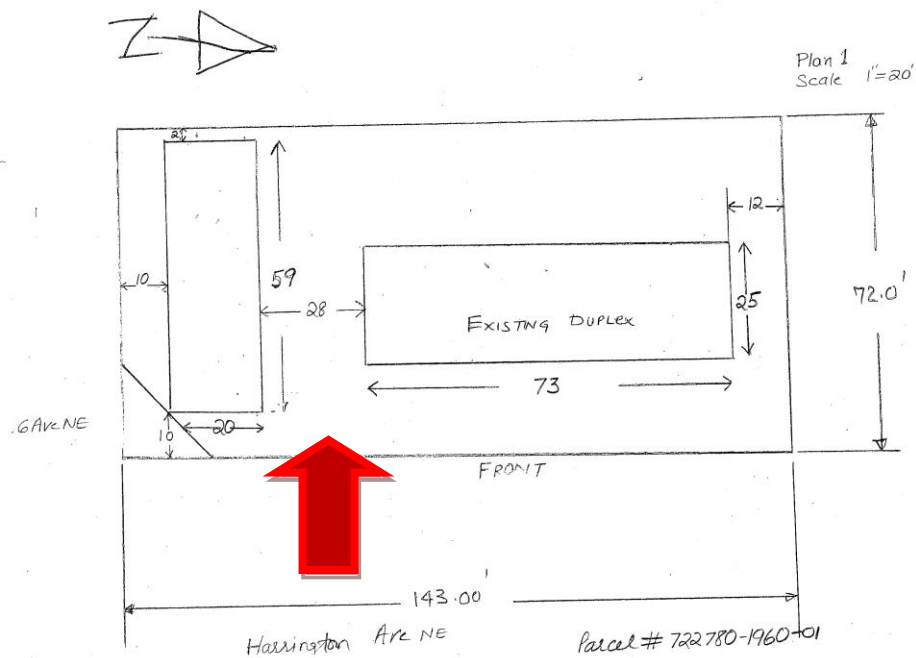
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7th and Harrington: The existing home appears to be a former duplex converted into a single family home. There are two doors on the existing home, one facing 7th (under the carport) and one facing the proposed new unit. Only 12 ft. would separate the two units, and the topography difference would result in the new unit peering down onto the existing unit and limiting privacy. Off street parking is not coordinated and would be at opposite ends of the homes both in front yards, giving the appearance of each parking area being in the back yard of the other unit. The second picture shows two units built on 16th under a similar side-by-side site plan. With the existing unit removed, this lot would be ideal for three or four cottage units that opened onto a common open space, with coordinated parking at the north end of the lot.

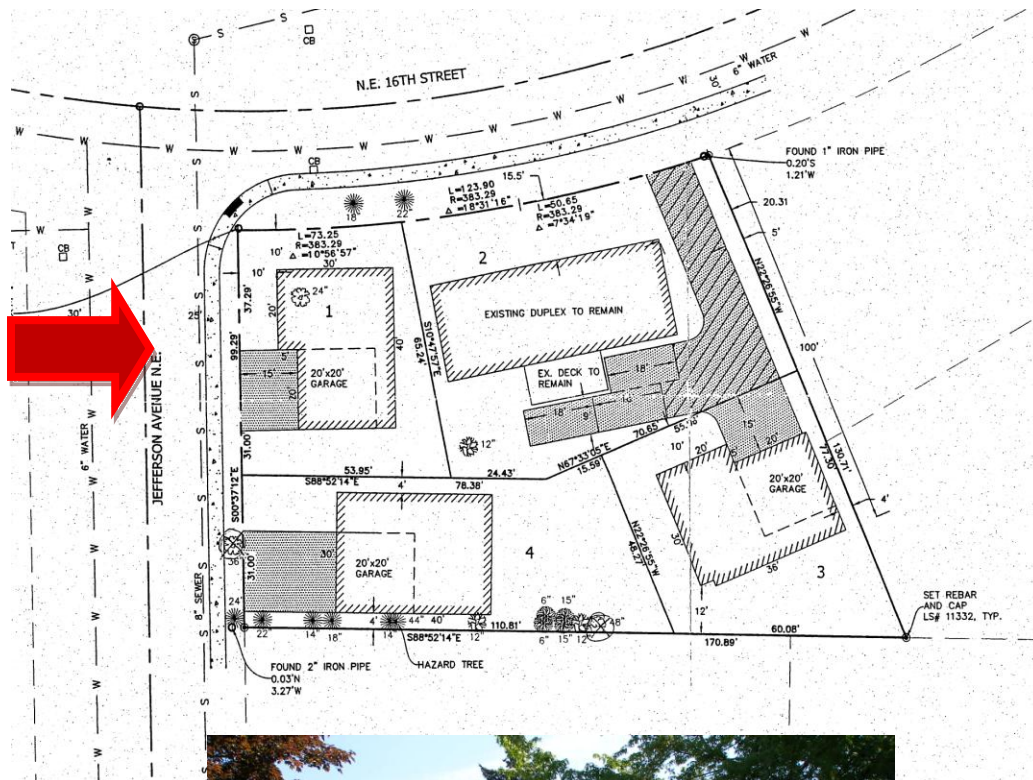


This Sunset Area property is an example of how properties lacking adequate privacy and open space look after they are built. This layout does not create a quality neighborhood.

16th and Harrington: This almost quarter acre piece proposes to add a second lot at the end of the existing duplex. The front door of one of the duplex units will face the back of the new home limiting privacy for both residences. The 28 ft. "yard" separating the entry of the existing duplex and the proposed unit is currently used as parking. Parking is not addressed and will likely occur in the same location, or between the structure and the street. Several significant trees on the corner would need to be removed. Removal of the duplex could result in a row of 3-4 townhomes, with an alley running behind them to provide off street parking spaces, or possibly a carriage unit. Large trees could be preserved that would give the new units a distinctive look and a focal point for shared open space.



Jefferson Glade: This proposal demonstrates the same lack of privacy and lack of open space as the others. Lack of coordinated parking and entry results in three driveways, two with parking in the front setback. It is not clear how the duplex unit with the entry 10 ft. from the back of unit on Lot 1 will have entry in the future. Lot 3 takes access from a driveway as close a 4 ft. to the existing duplex with the front yard dominated by the parking area for the duplex. Staff worked long hours with this applicant to make voluntary improvements for coordinated access, parking, and a small bit of open space. However, privacy, open space, and layout could all be improved if the existing duplex was removed.



Harrington Glade: This proposal stacks up lots in a subdivision, creating little privacy or open space for any of the potential units. Lots 3A, 3B, and 4A do not front on a public space. The location of the existing units prevents the creation of an alley for coordinated parking or access. Garages that currently provide off street parking for the duplexes would need to be removed and major trees are located where the access easement is proposed for lots 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, and 4. Proposed open space is not located in a spot that could be easily used by most of the units and is dominated by the parking and access for one of the duplex units in Lot 1A. Instead of a whole block of low quality housing, removal of the existing duplexes could yield 9-14 units that could include townhomes, cottages, single-family homes, carriage units, or some combination. Units could be clustered around open space(s) and served with an alley for access and parking.



APPROACHES

Require Removal: In most cases, removal of the existing unit would allow more comprehensive, creative, and higher quality designs for new housing. An overlay targeting the Sunset Area would limit the scope of this change. This action is not supported by the work of the Highlands Citizen's Task Force on Zoning in 2006, but many conditions have changed in the last six years. There is no fear of residents being displaced and the City receives more comments that revitalization is happening too slowly, than it is moving too swiftly. Multiple incentives exist to make redevelopment feasible, including the *Planned Action and EIS*, which eliminates the need for most environmental review, tax exemptions, and fee waivers. Removal of the existing unit also typically allows zoning to be maximized, yielding additional units and profit. In order for this to be successful, the code would need to contain an alternative review process that established conditions under which an existing unit could be kept. If applied conservatively, this would provide a way for existing units to be kept, but would still further the policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the intent of the R-14 zone. One of the benefits of this approach is that it is very clear that existing development is to be phased out and that exceptions will be few. It is a proactive posture most likely to result in new development achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and the Sunset Area Revitalization Program.

Compliance with the Design Guidelines: Under this option, when a property was subdivided or when attached units were added, existing units would be required to meet the residential design standards. This was the approach recommended by the Highlands Citizen's Task Force. Although these guidelines are fairly comprehensive and address topics related to site planning, lot layout, and features incorporated into the dwelling unit, the R-14 guidelines would need to be reviewed carefully. Some of the guidelines do not go far enough to prevent issues that have already become apparent (such as stacking lots or lack of privacy in site plans), and some of the requirements for building design are unlikely to be met by any of the existing units in the Sunset Area. Changes to the guidelines would need to be considered in order to make this approach effective. Under this scenario, property owners would have the option to upgrade or remove the existing unit in order to redevelop. In the end, some units would be upgraded and remain. This approach implements the work of the first Task Force, but will leave a patchwork of existing development that may delay full revitalization. It is a reactive posture that accepts moderate quality in exchange for development activity.

Potential zone: A potential zone would involve changing the R-14 zone or creating a new zone. This approach creates two layers of zoning: a base zoning condition in which most new development would not be allowed, and a potential zoning condition that would allow new development only if certain conditions were met. One of the conditions would be removal of the existing development. This would ensure that new development is consistent with the policies of the Comprehensive Plan and the goals of

Sunset Area Revitalization. However, lowering the base zoning may have a minor effect of reinforcing the existing pattern of development.